

The Switch

by Dragonheim

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Summary: After Boss goes over the deep end when Cappy ends up breaking his new water cooler, things start getting really weird for some of the other hamhams.

1. Boss' Rage

THE SWITCH

I need to quit writing all these new stories. xD

Anyways, for those who may be confused or don't know what I'm talking about, a water cooler is one of those things you might see in an office building where people stand around and talk or whatever. And it gives you water. :D

Oh yeah, and as stupid as this story might sound now, it will get interesting pretty quickly. As in, chapter 2 quickly. Which I've already written. Yay for planning ahead! And yay for sticking to the good ol' style of not using OC's in any of my fics! I'll continue Deadly Secrets sometime, too.

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"Check it out, guys!" Boss said, dragging a heavy box into the room.
"Guess what I just bought!"

The hams-hams looked up from their usual spots about the round table in the center of the room. Since Boss wasn't there when they arrived, most had gone to entertain themselves in various corners of the clubhouse.

"Hey Boss, where've you been?" Stan greeted him.

"And what's in the box?" Cappy asked.

Boss chuckled. "Well, that's what I'm about to show ya!" He hauled the box onto the table and set it down with an audible clang. The other hams gathered around the table, and leaned in for a view. Boss took a scissors and carefully cut the rather large box open.

Stan looked at the object inside. "â€œ I don't get it."

"What do you mean you don't get it?" Boss said, irritated. "It's a water cooler!"

The ham-hams stared at it in wonder while the field hamster lifted the machine out of the container. Setting it on the ground, it could be recognized that it stood about as tall as Howdy.

"That looks like so neat, Boss!" Sandy said excitedly.

"What's it do?" the hamsters asked in unison.

He set the jug of water on top of it and attached it tightly, and flicked the switch on. Out of the spout came fresh, clean water.

"See? No more yucky creek water for us. We've got a water cooler now!" Boss exclaimed. He was the most excited about his new buy.

"What a great investment, Boss!" Dexter acknowledged. "Mind if I take a drink?"

Stan pushed him out of his way. "Me first!" He took one of the plastic cups, filled it to the brim, and gulped down every drop. Dexter, obviously peeved, though being more polite, waited his turn. When both had finished their drinks, Boss offered to throw away their cups.

"So? It was good, eh?" he said with a grin.

"Oh definitely! It was even more refreshing that the water I get at home," he said happily.

Stan agreed. "I admit, though, it tastes kinda weird. Where'd you get it?"

"Oh, it came with the cooler. It might be expired, I dunno. I have another jug of it out by the door, I haven't brought it in yet. I guess we'll just have to drink these before we get new ones."

Stan simply gazed at him with a look of "water _expires?" while Boss began to move the machine into the corner of the room. "I think it'll be good here, don't ya think?" The others nodded in concurrence.

"Great!" he shouted cheerfully. "Now where were we â€œ right! We were going to Acorn Mountain today, correct?"

Stan pumped his fist in the air while the other looked on. "Yes!" he shouted. "We'd better get packing, I've got some â€œ ahem â€œ _womanizing_ to do." His last sentence was greeted with a harsh slap to the back of the head from his sister. The rest simply rolled their eyes, and went off to begin stuffing their backpacks with all their picnic supplies.

There wasn't much to bring along minus some extra food and a picnic blanket, because they were going to need most of the room in their packs to take home the various nuts they would each collect on their trip. After all, next to sunflower seeds, acorns were probably their favorite snack.

Since Cappy didn't need to pack anything, the older hams offered to carry the extra stuff, he decided to put his bag by the door and go take a drink from Boss' new water cooler. He took one of the cups, held it under the nozzle and, being careful not to spill any, filled it up about halfway, then took a big, long sip, and sighed happily.

"_I agree with Dexter, this is the best water ever!"_ he thought to himself. He was just about to refill his cup for another drink when out of nowhere, Stan came charging by him, followed closely by Sandy.

"STAN!" she shouted after him. "GIVE ME BACK MY BAG!" She could've got close enough to catch him if it wasn't for Cappy standing in her way. While Stan had seen him and jumped out of the way, Sandy had not been paying attention and crashed right into the poor hamster, sending him flying into the water cooler. Without warning, the entire contraption tumbled over, instantly cracking the plastic on the jug and spraying water all over the floor.

Cappy rubbed his eyes for a brief moment, and look over at what he had done. "Oh no â€|" Sandy had a similar worried expression on her face.

Boss, who was in his room, heard the commotion from outside. "What's going on in-" He didn't get a chance to finish his sentence before his mouth dropped open at the mess that lie before him. Sandy, thinking quickly, inched away from the spill as the fuming field hamster trudged over to it.

"ALRIGHT â€| !" he spat. "Just who did this?"

Cappy, seeing that now he was the only one even close to the broken appliance, pulled his hat over his face in shame. But Boss had no sympathy for the embarrassed hamster; he picked him up by the fur on his chest and held him up.

"Cappy, what on earth did you do? Do you realize how much I paid for this?" he said angrily. Cappy closed his eyes and nodded 'yes'. "I can't give you guys anything without one of you totally destroying it! I'm TIRED of it!" With that, he tossed him to the ground and stormed back to his room.

"The trip's off! No one's going to Acorn Mountain today!" came the muffled voice from the back room.

The ham-hams were taken aback by his sudden outburst. Even if Boss was the rough type, this was not in character for him. Pashmina, seeing that the capped hamster had broken out into tears, quickly walked over and comforted him.

Sandy felt ashamed at what she had done, pinning the blame on innocent Cappy. Stan seemed to notice it too, for he looked at her with a cynical face, not making her feel much better.

"Well then," Maxwell said timidly, "What shall we do now?"

"I say we all point and laugh at my sister," Stan said. Sandy stomped on his foot, making him wince in pain. She even got a giggle out of Cappy.

"I say we should maybe go home for the day," Howdy suggested. "There's no use stickin' around here with a wild bear on the loose."

The other ham-hams, though disappointed, agreed with him.

"Fine with me! we'd better let Boss cool off a bit. Maybe we can go to Acorn Mountain tomorrow," Panda said.

That said, Howdy took his broom and a rag and cleaned up the mess, and Sandy and Cappy volunteered to help since they had caused it too. The rest put their bags away and got ready to leave. It was only around 10:00 that morning, and it would mean they would have to spend the rest of the day at home in their boring old cages, but a break would probably do them well.

After the spill was cleaned up, the three hamsters were the last ones left, minus Boss in his room and Stan, who was waiting for Sandy to come with him.

"Maybe I can get Panda to help me fix it up, I dunno," Howdy said, scratching the back of his head. "I dun want Boss to feel bad or nothin'." Sandy nodded.

"Good idea, maybe he'd get over it then." Before she walked out the door with her big brother, she faced Cappy and whispered in his ear.

"I'm sorry for making it look like it was your fault Boss' new water cooler broke. I should've taken the blame when he started yelling at you. Don't take it too personally, I'm sure he didn't intend to make you sad."

"It's okay," he sniffled. "I'm sure he was just mad about it, that's all." Of course, Cappy didn't mean it at all. What Boss did to him made him really depressed, and all he wanted to do was go home and curl up in the warm arms of his humans.

Sandy took his words sincerely, and casually walked over to Stan, who was impatiently tapping his foot. They both turned towards the exit and made their way out, Cappy moving alongside them.

"_Huh â€|I feel really weird." _Stan thought as he walked. _"I hope that 'expired' water didn't make me sick."

Ding! Chapter's done!

2. Oddities

CHAPTER 2

"Remember on Lost when they met _the others?_"

Sorry. I had to say that.

Cappy woke up the following morning. Yesterday's conflict lingered in his mind like the smell of expired food in one's refrigerator. It just wouldn't leave.

Just thinking about the fight between he and Boss made him sick to his stomach. Most ham-hams would have just let be and forgot about it, but being so sensitive, it really cut him deep. Usually, he didn't get that much action in an entire week. I mean, it wasn't ALL his fault that the brand new water cooler tipped over after he had taken a drink ¦ it was just an accident, that's all.

He sighed, feeling heavy with guilt. It was all his fault, even if Sandy had just ran past him and made him lose his balance and fall on the machine. He couldn't deny it.

"_No!" _he thought._ "I can't keep pinning this guilt onto me!"_ The fight wasn't even that big of a deal, but it kept popping into his mind. Actually, it wasn't the fact that he didn't like arguments - it was because Boss had shoved him to the ground out of anger. He seemed to care more about his silly new water cooler than his friend. All Boss cared about was the money he'd just spent on it. It infuriated Cappy to think that someone he looked up to so much would do that to him.

"_Maybe if I just ignore it and forget it happened, everything will be okay."_-

He sat up and yawned, and rubbed his face with his hands. Suddenly, he blinked in surprise.

"What the â€œ|?"

The night had gone by quickly. Stan woke up on his stomach, but felt weird today. He wasn't sick, he just felt differently than usual. He slowly opened his eyes, feeling tired as if he had just been working out before he went to bed. But he hadn't run on his whiz-wheel last night. Perhaps he was just worn out from the previous day's events, or the stale water had gotten to him.

He opened his eyes a little further to notice that Noel's hand lying near him. "Weird ¯ I must have fallen asleep on Noel's bed." He shut his eyes again to daydream for a while about - big surprise everyone - girl-hams. As usual.

Stan must have dozed off again. He had quickly forgotten he fell asleep near his owner and was surprise to find himself lying on the soft blankets. He figured he'd better get back to his cage before his human woke up.

Still feeling drowsy, he extended his arms and stretched. Suddenly, he realized something wrong. Stan felt his arms hanging off the side of the bed, yet he was at least a foot away from the edge. He also noticed something else strange — Noel's arm was also hanging off the edge of the bed. Stan moved his arm again, and Noel's arm moved with it. Then, reality hit him like a ton of bricks. Noel wasn't copying his movements. Stan was human. Stan was Noel._

He shot up as fast as one could. His eyes darted around the room, and back down at himself. Gosh, he was _gigantic_. Compared to what he was before, he was only 7 centimeters; only about as long as his finger right now.

Panic seized him. Why the heck was he in Noel's body?!

Stan leaped out of his owner's bed and stumbled to the nearest mirror, as if he needed more proof than he already had. He took a long, hard gaze at who he had turned into. He touched the mirror to see if the reflection he saw was really his, and yes it was. The truth was still not sinking into him.

Maybe he was dreaming! Yes, that's it; this couldn't be real at all. He walked over to the bathroom sink and, remembering how his human worked it, turned the handle up, cupped his hands underneath it, and splashed himself with water. Sputtering, he quickly wiped his face off with his sleeve. To his horror, it wasn't a dream.

Stan was so confused he could hardly stand it. What would the other ham-hams think? There was no way he could convince them that he was their fellow hamster friend, in fact, they basically avoided humans other than their own. He could never fit into the clubhouse if he tried, either. Plus, he wasn't used to his new size yet, what if he hurt one of them by accident? The more he thought of it, it would be very awkward if say, Hillary came by and said she was Sandy or something.

Then, a thought came into his head. Maybe ... just maybe there was a grain of hope for him. What if he wasn't the only one who had turned into a human overnight? Yes, there was nothing that he did yesterday that the ham-hams didn't do, so if they all did the same thing, they must have all gotten the same voodoo-hex that had done this to them. Unless their owners had something to do with it â€!

Then he remembered something. If _he_ was in his human's body, then where was his _human_?

He slowly glanced over at his old cage to see a commotion. The striped hamster — himself — was running in mad circles all over the soft bedding. It didn't take long for him to realize that the two of them must have switched places in their sleep. Stan carefully walked over to Noel who was inside of it, and watched as the poor hamster backed himself into a corner in fear. He watched him for a while, trying to figure out just what might be going through his head at the moment. Probably the same stuff that was going through his own head, he thought to himself.

He carefully lifted the metal door, and grabbed his maracas. How tiny they were! Yet how fun to play they'd still be.

Stan considered reaching past and picking Noel up, but decided

against it. He didn't want terrify him any more than he already was. Instead, he propped open the door, just in case his owner wanted to explore his own room at his new size. Stan waved goodbye, but Noel didn't see, for he was curled up in a ball near the food dish.

Turns out for Stan, he wasn't the only one having a rough morning after all.

Curtis was running around his eyewear shop frantically. For some reason this morning, he felt nervous and afraid for the store to open today. What was he going to do, what was he supposed to say to those humans?

If you hadn't already guessed, Dexter was having an out-of-the-ordinary morning himself. Alarmed to find himself in his human's body when he woke up, and even more surprised to find his owner in his old body, the only thing he could do right now was panic. Curtis apparently had no idea what was going on either and was gripping the cage bars trying to get Dexter's attention, but the now-human was much to skittish to even go near him.

Trying to find a way to calm himself down, he sat down at the counter by the register. He took off his glasses only to realize how poor eyesight his human really had, and put them back on. After that, he examined his new hands closely, and toyed with anything he could find. No other words could describe his new thumbs except for "awesome". It was so easy to pick up things now!

He couldn't run the shop that day, he would probably just mess everything up and make his owner upset with him. Thinking quickly, he picked up the nearest pen and a piece of paper, and wrote "CLOSED FOR MAINTINENCE. SORRY FOR THE INCONVENIENCE" in big letters, and posted it by the closed sign. He, too, wanted to see if this phenomenon had happened to any other of the ham-hams. Snickering to the thought of Howdy being turned into Goldie, a girl, he grabbed a coat and walked out the door towards the clubhouse. Even though it was quite warm out, Dexter put the coat on because he wasn't used to the furless body of his human yet.

Stan walked down the sidewalk. He still felt awkward when moving, for he wasn't quite used to his new form yet. It felt strange to be the same height or taller than the other humans and pets he passed, too. Normally, he would be eye-level with their shoelaces or just taller than a dog's paw. But now it was different; he felt powerful and in control.

By now, he was getting pretty close to the clubhouse. Just then, he looked down the sidewalk in the distance to see who he thought was Curtis, and he appeared to be heading to the same place. Dexter looked up and saw Noel. The two eyed each other carefully, trying to confirm their identities before greeting. How embarrassing it would be to greet another human as their hamster!

They both took a turn off the path towards the tree. Seeing this, Dexter approached Stan first. He held out his hand confidently and said, "You're who I think you are â€“ right?"

Stan paused for a brief moment, making Dexter start to sweat with anxiety. But then he smiled, and took his hand into his own. "Nice to see ya, buddy!"

"So you too?" Dexter asked.

Stan tilted his head to the side. "Yeah â€“ I woke up and I was just like, WHOA."

"Me too," he sighed. "What about your human? Was he—"

"Yup, him too. I almost feel bad, ya know? One minute your normal, and the next minute you're like a hundredth of your normal size. It would suck."

"I bet we can't be the only ones, either."

"We'll find out, I guess. But what abou—" Stan paused when he heard the faint click of a door below him. The two looked down to see Boss, with Sandy and Panda, all three still hamsters, with rather startled expressions on their faces.

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yeaaaahhhh.

3. Through the Eyes of a Hamster

CHAPTER 3

It may take months, but I do update! Now that I'm on summer vacation I should have more time. :D

This chapter's much longer than my usual to make up for it.

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Upon seeing each other, both groups froze. The humans didn't know what to say to the ham-hams; the ham-hams didn't know what some of their owners were doing there. It seemed like minutes passed before one of them, Stan, decided to take the easy way out once again. He fled, kicking up a cloud of dust on his way out. Dexter, though a little annoyed, decided it best to just follow him.

"Stan!" he said as he caught up to him, "Slow down! My owner's - wheeze - not in as good of shape as yours!" Stan turned and looked, making sure he was out of sight from the clubhouse, and stopped.

"Good! Now we're outta there. No worries."

"Why in the world do you always run away from stressful situations?" Dexter said angrily.

"Well, excuse me if you had a better plan."

Dexter rolled his eyes. "We could've explained what was going on, you know."

"No way, man!" Stan said back. "You know they're not gonna believe it. They're just gonna think - Stan and Dexter's humans have gone mad!"

"Until they check our houses after we've been gone for weeks."

"Yah. That's kind of what I was hoping for."

"Stan!"

Stan simply ignored him, happily wallowing in his own arrogance while Dexter was about to blow a fuse. The moment was broken when the loud clomping of shoes and panting could be heard approaching them. Could it be? Yes, it was Kip.

"Curtis and uh â€| umm â€| Noel! I need to ask you a question it's reallyreallyreally importa-"

"Slow down there!" Stan said. "Don't worry, I have a feeling I know what you're here for."

Kip looked up and smiled slightly. "I was just going to ask you â€|"

"Stan." he replied with his real name.

"What about Stan?" Kip asked, confused.

At that moment both Dexter and Stan's stopped in horror. _Dang â€| what if he's not really Cappy? Oh shoot now what do we do?!

Then Kip seemed to get the picture. "Ohh! I see now! I was just wondering like â€| aw gee I'm just glad I'm not the only one," he said sheepishly.

"Well I'm glad you're not actually Kip, because you kind of had us freaked out for a second." Dexter said.

"Uh huh," he mumbled. They noticed that Cappy had already found a human-sized hat and put it on. That should've been a dead giveaway. "Say, have you been to the clubhouse? I want to see what it looks like from way high!"

Dexter glanced around before answering. "Well â€| we did, but didn't think it was a good idea to tell the others yet. That's why we came back here."

"What do you mean, 'tell the others'?" he asked.

"Umm â€| you see â€| I think us three might be the only ones who actually turned into humans overnight." Dexter sucked in air through his teeth.

"But â€| why!" Cappy suddenly seemed frustrated at the thought. "What if we're stuck like this â€| _forever? What could've done this to ONLY us three?"

"Couldn't tell ya, dude," was Stan's only answer. There was a brief silence, until Dexter looked down at their feet.

"Stan! why aren't you wearing shoes?"

Stan looked up at Dexter, a bit taken aback at the comment. "Why would I be wearing shoes?"

"Stan!" he said angrily. "Humans are very sophisticated creatures, you have to look nice around others! You can't be walking around like a hippie!"

"I can too walk around like a hippie!" he stated, not knowing what a hippie was but figured he'd sound smart for saying it. "Since when is there a rule that humans have to wear shoes EVERYWHERE?"

"Since that sign on the entrance of this store we're by." He gestured to a rectangular sign on a gift shop nearby that read NO SHIRT - NO SHOES - NO SERVICE. "Emphasis on the 'no shoes' part."

"So what? I can't get into a store?"

"Just! you have to look like a normal human, okay? We can't have people thinking we're weird. We don't want to ruin our owner's reputations, you know."

"I'm wearing shoes! Am I doing good?" Cappy blurted. Dexter nodded "yes".

"Well, let's go back to our houses and see if we can get a word out of our owners. Since we used to speak hamster, we should understand it, and our owners in our old bodies will be able to understand human when we speak it. I hope it works." They turned in opposite directions to get back to their own homes.

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Kip had already had a long day. He woke up after Cappy had left, which he was glad for, but Sue was still home. As usual, she excitedly came over to him to wake him up, but Kip was less than thrilled. He continually jumped from her hand when she tried to pick him up, and went deeper into the cage each time, making it harder for her to dig him back out. She even tried to offer him a hat that resembled a cooking pot, which he gladly accepted - but only used to hide under. Getting tired of his stubbornness, she just gave up and went back to work.

"Criminey! I didn't think my wife could get any more annoying," he said, tossing off the pot after making sure Sue was far away. "I hope Cappy doesn't feel this way every day, I'd seriously feel bad for him. Maybe I'll lay off the spoiling a little bit. Just not much." he said the last part with a smile. He, of course, also didn't know what caused the change overnight. He only assumed it was a form of strange punishment, and left it at that. The size of the cage, though! It was as if he were living in a mansion. All the neat little furniture made it feel a little more like home and less like a dirty old hamster cage.

He walked around the area looking for the softest pieces of materials he could, and arranged them in a pile. Maybe he could sleep the rest of this bizarre day away. Hopefully when Cappy returned, he wouldn't be as lively as Sue. He turned three times in a circle, almost by

some weird instinct, and laid down, closing his beady eyes.

Later, Cappy came home to his convenience store, slipped off his shoes that he was so proud to be wearing, and walked in. He was glad to see Sue there, and she seemed to be her normal old self. She said "hi", but kept working and continued to dust off some dirty shelves. If he wasn't able to talk to Kip, at least he had a second owner to talk to. Cappy always did think he was the luckiest ham-ham of the bunch, having two owners while the others had one. He considered sharing with Boss, but he declined.

He was about to explore the shop a little bit when Sue turned away from her work and looked in his direction. "Say Kip, you better check out little Cappy! He seems a little strange today. He didn't even want to be petted! You should check to make sure he's not sick." She seemed concerned, so he complied. He was going to go over there anyways.

"Okay, I'll check on Cappy. You just ∞ keep doin' your stuff, haha!" Sue noticed that even Kip seemed jumpy today, but ignored it.

Cappy moved slowly over to his old cage. Even at his size now, it seemed surprisingly large. What a spoiled hamster he was! His eyes scanned the cage for his owner, who he found lying in a pile of fluff that had not been there before. Seemed like he was already getting the hang of the hamster life. Cappy clicked the latch to one of the doors and reached in his hand near the sleepy Kip. He wasn't budging. Cappy figured it would be easier just to pick him up himself, even though he didn't like it when his humans did that in particular. Kip didn't seem to object though. He held him near his face, and patted him softly on the head.

Cappy was about to say something to him when Sue interjected. "Kip! There's customers waiting to be helped, and I'm busy! You'll have to put away Cappy and come work the register for now." He nodded in agreement, and placed the hamster back into the oversized cage. Kip curled right back into the spot where he started.

Cappy had no idea what in the world he was doing, either - he never watched his owners at work. He would just have to survive the day.

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Curtis looked around the empty eyeglass shop. He wanted to leave his cage and check the place out, but since it was on a table high off the ground, he stayed in place to avoid hurting himself. He just then noticed the sign that Dexter had put on the door - closed.
CLOSED?

"We can't be closed!" he said aloud. "There are customers to help! People need to see! What'll they think of me just randomly closing my store? Plus all the money I'm losing ∞ !" He mumbled the last part. "What on earth could he be doing that is so important he had to close the store?" He was still somewhat in shock from waking up as a hamster. How could it have happened? He had no idea. Was there anything different he did the day before that caused it? Couldn't have been. All he did was sell glasses. Maybe it was a certain pair ∞ !

He stopped upon seeing the dark silhouette of a human stop by the front door. He hoped it was Dexter returning, for deep down he really wanted to talk to him. It would be interesting to see what his pet had to say. Maybe Dexter liked eyeglasses too! He waited patiently for him to come in.

Dexter took the key out of his coat pocket to open the door to the eyeglasses shop. The notice was still on the door, but he left it there. He decided to wait a while before helping customers. He hung the jacket on the hanger right where he had found it.

He paused by one of the tables in the store. Being fascinated by glasses as a hamster, he was especially excited that he could now actually lift the pairs in his shop and try them on. He browsed through a few, then moved to the next table. After trying on pair after pair after pair, he forgot that his owner, in his old hamster body, was still in the store. He strolled over the cage on one of the shelves. Luckily, the former human had decided not to leave.

Dexter wondered if he should handle him or not. He knew that humans were not used to being picked up, and didn't want to make him afraid. However, Curtis looked more than eager. He was already up next to the side of the cage, his face pressed halfway through the bars. Dexter figured that he wasn't afraid. Trying to remember carefully the details of how his human properly handled him as a hamster, he slowly opened the cage door and laid out his hand as a platform. Curtis jumped onto his palm and looked up at his old body. Dexter simply smiled, and petted him delicately.

He thought back to his idea that his owner could possibly understand him, and planned on trying it out. But what was he supposed to say? In a weird way he wanted it to be special, like a first word spoken. But on the other hand, they'd known each other for a long time â€‘ why not just make it average conversation? He quickly cleared his throat and spoke.

"Say Curtis, before I go on â€‘ can you understand what I'm saying?"

At least Dexter was having an easier time with his owner than Stan was about to have.

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Noel paced around the cage anxiously. A part of him wanted to leave, just to walk around his room for a bit as a hamster; the other part told him to seal himself from the outside world to keep from getting hurt. Either way, he didn't want to get face-to-face with his old body. His hamster would probably kill him for every time he forgot to give him fresh water or clean out his cage. He shuddered at the thought of what Stan could do to him as a hamster.

His eyes widened at the sound of a click by the front door. "_Damn!_" he thought. Noel looked around the room, then at the door to the cage. He HAD to get out. There's no way Stan could find him in this seemingly gigantic room. He went up to the sliding door and hastily opened it, hopping out onto the carpet. He could hear the human's footsteps coming closer, and he began to sweat. Making a mad dash to a pile of books and clothes near his bed, he hid behind them. There was just enough light peeking through so that he could see Stan walk

in the door.

Stan walked into the room, which felt unnaturally small at the moment. His cage felt bigger than this when he was a hamster. The second thing he noticed was Noel seemed to have calmed down; there was no noise or movement seen from the cage. He walked up to it, trying not to startle his owner who was secretly watching from a distance. Stan opened the cage door and looked in for a second, only to realize his human - er, hamster - wasn't even inside. He sighed and stood up to full height, causing Noel to back down further into the mess of his own belongings. The human backed into the middle of the room.

"Noel â€| I know you're in here somewhere."

Oddly enough, it was surprising for Noel to hear his hamster talk, even if he was a human now. He watched as Stan kneeled down again and scanned the room. When he turned to check the other half of the room, Noel took the chance to bury himself under one of his T-shirts. Little did he know that Stan was not only looking for him, but listening too.

"HA!" he exclaimed, diving for the terrified hamster. Noel tried to escape by running under his bed, but before he could take off Stan had slammed his hand down, knocking the wind out of him. He struggled to break loose, but his tiny muscles were no match to his old body's. Stan held on tightly, preventing him from moving but giving him enough leeway to breathe. Perhaps even that was too much. Just then, Noel had an idea. "Wait a minute 'cept what else have I got these teeth for?" He took the chance and bit Stan as hard as he could muster, causing Stan to flinch and drop him to the floor.

"Geezus! That little nip hurt a lot more than you'd think it would!" Stan said to himself, rubbing the bite-mark which had now started to drip blood. Noel, on the other hand, was already on his way into hiding again. He only fell but 2 feet, but it left a small bruise on his leg when he landed causing him to limp and run a little slower than usual.

Stan stood back up again and thought for a second. "If I can't catch him this way, how else am I gonna do it?" A plan almost instantly came to mind. He took a few casual steps over to the hamster, who was still trying to make a break for it. "Noel!" he called out, making him look back at his old self. Stan gained a wicked grin on his face, lifting his foot high into the air above the hamster as if he were going to stomp on him. Noel's eyes widened, and he could only sputter out a small squeak before falling over backwards. He had fainted.

Stan placed his foot back onto the carpet and gently picked up the limp hamster. "Well, that worked nicely."

(love those x's)

Next chapter, expect some conflict between the ham-hams and human hamsters! I'm pretty pumped to write that one so it shouldn't take SO long.

4. Tying Some Knots

KAPITEL VIER

Ja ja ja ja ja. Kinda forgot about this fanfic, oops.

Dexter looked down at the hamster in his hands, waiting for a reply. Curtis stayed silent.

Dexter, though slightly frustrated, understood what he felt. "I guess you don't have to talk if you don't want to. It's up to you." He was about to put Curtis back into his cage, but decided against it. Instead, he placed him on his shoulder to ride around a bit, because he astoundingly didn't seem afraid at all, or at least very little. Dexter just walked around the store cleaning up for a short time, and quickly ran out of things to do since his owner had done such a good job himself before the switch. Neatness seemed to be a trait of both of them.

He took Curtis off his shoulder and set him back in the cage. Dexter had other plans in mind for the day, and he really wanted to see what real humans do for fun when they don't have work. He put on the jacket again and was about to leave when he looked back at his owner. He didn't want him to be bored by himself all day, sitting with nothing to do in his cage, and besides, he could trust him well enough. He went back over to the counter and took him out, and laid him on the floor. Dexter took one of the shelves that had been taken off the wall and positioned it like a ramp for Curtis to easily make his way back onto the table if he needed it. He gave the hamster a quick pat on the head. "Stay in the shop, and don't get hurt. I'll be back in a little while." Curtis simply looked up at him as he walked out the door, the bell making its typical "ting" that usually signaled that a customer was coming in or leaving.

As soon as his old hamster was out of sight, Curtis went behind the counter to avoid being seen by anybody walking by, because they might try and look in to see why the store was closed today. What they didn't know wouldn't hurt them. He did curse himself for not saying anything to Dexter, though. The next time he has the chance, he probably wouldn't even be listening. A hamster would most likely be hard to hear with the average human ear, and Curtis' human ears weren't as good as they used to be.

The newfound freedom he had with being outside the cage was a nice change, however. He could have the chance to explore the shop at his own pace, without being on the shoulder of a human. Too bad the only high place he could reach easily was the table that his cage sat on, thanks to the ramp Dexter had put up. To get anywhere else and look through the glasses, he'd need to do some climbing. At least his hamster seemed in better condition than he ever was in his old body.

X X X X X X X X X X X X X X X X X X X X

Back at the clubhouse, Boss, Sandy, and Panda were back to the main part explaining what they had seen to the others.

"It was them, I swear! Stan and Dexter's humans were RIGHT OUTSIDE our clubhouse door!" Panda said excitedly, "It couldn't have just been a coincidence that both of them were there, could it?"

"It could have been, actually," Maxwell was the first to add. "Our clubhouse isn't that far off the trail in the park, and they might have seen each other and pulled to the side to talk. Hamster owners share a lot of common interests, you know."

Boss was skeptical about it, though. "I think you're full of baloney. Noel wouldn't be randomly talking to Curtis, because Curtis is way older. And that they were both in front of OUR tree? I don't think so. The humans that walk through don't veer off the trail.

"And don't you guys think it's strange that Noel and Curtis were here, but neither Stan nor Dexter came today?" Sandy added. The others thought it over, and it was a good point.

"You don't think maybe their humans found out about the clubhouse, locked their cage doors, and came to check it out themselves? What if our owners do the same?" Hamtarō said worriedly.

Maxwell reassured him. "Don't worry, I don't think their owners would lock their cage doors shut, and neither would ours. Besides, how would they ever find out that they've been leaving and coming here for the past year or so? Tell them? I highly doubt it."

"They could follow them here, too." Panda said. Howdy rolled his eyes.

"Like they wouldn't notice their humans following them here! Gimme a break!"

"Guys! GUYS! No need to argue! It just seems to be that it was all a big coincidence. The chances of all that happening were probably a million to one, but it was our luck it all occurred like that. Furthermore, Cappy never came today either. It could be that they just all were busy with other things." Maxwell inferred.

Most of them seemed convinced, but Boss wasn't done yet. "When the three of us were out there, did any of you notice that not only did both of them look surprised, but Noel sprinted off? Seems fishy, don't you think?"

"You're right," it's not like he'd be afraid of rodents or anything, seeing as he owns one." Sandy said. "Curtis followed as soon as Stan's owner left."

"There's only one thing to do that'll answer our questions for sure," Hamtarō declared, "and that's to go to their houses and get to the bottom of this!"

Stan sat on his bed by his passed-out hamster. All he could do for now was to wait for him to come to his senses, which should be any minute.

But what would he do when he did wake up? Would he have to chase him around the room again? He hoped he wouldn't need to go through

that nonsense again. And he couldn't just let him roam around, because he seemed to get into too much danger. After thinking about it for a moment, he realized that the only danger Noel had encountered had come from Stan himself. He just didn't want him getting hurt. Maybe he could â€¦

Stan put clasped his hands behind his head and laid down on his bedspread to rest. He needed to do something today besides just sit in his room and sleep all day. Well, he did go outside, walked to the clubhouse, and met up with Cappy and Dexter, but he was out for no longer than a half-hour. It didn't take him very long to get places as a human anymore.

He thought about what to do. His mind drifted over to his sister. He could easily get her back for every time she'd appear behind him and scare him, every time she dragged him away from a hot ham-babe, and every time she'd run up to him like a freight train and tackle him. Ooh, revenge would be very sweet. What to do first, though? Hold her upside-down by her tail? Lay on her? Toss her up in the air a few times and catch her again? Nah, he figured he'd better not make it too risky. As much as he would have wanted to, he didn't want to make her too mad.

—

"What the hell is this? God damn â€¦"

—

Stan, a little startled, lifted his head to see that his owner had woken up, and didn't look very pleased. Apparently Stan's little trick had worked. While Noel was unconscious, he had taken a small segment of string and tied both his front paws to the backboard of his bed. The one thing that caught Stan's attention the most, though, was the fact that he had just heard the hamster talk! He could've sworn a hamster's voice was not audible to a human. Even though he didn't like knowing that his human might have overheard him talking to himself as a hamster, he was thrilled to know that they might be able to understand each other now.

"This sucks," Noel sighed, giving up trying to untie himself.

Stan sat up on the bed again and looked down at the pitiful hamster. Noel had nowhere to run this time, and since he knew he couldn't get away for long, it would be no use anyways. He'd be better of saving his energy for something else. Stan reached down and carefully untied the strings off of Noel's paws, and made sure that he grabbed him right away before he dashed away again. He closed his hands around him to make sure he wouldn't get anywhere, but after a couple seconds he didn't feel him struggling anymore. He took this as a good sign and opened his hands up into a cup shape. To Stan's delight, Noel stayed put.

He held him up to eye level and spoke in a soft but firm voice. "Listen, man, I know you can understand me, and I just heard you when you were tied down. Let's just make this easier for both of us and talk," he said. Noel was hesitant at first, but finally shook his head "yes". Stan smiled; he had never actually been able to talk to his owner before and have him reply back.

"Now then," he continued, "before we get to anything else, do you know why the hell we're all switched around?!" Noel shook his head "no". Stan was disappointed to know that his human knew nothing of it either, and set him back down on the bed. Stan sat down next to him.

"If we can find a way to work through this, maybe we can make things straight again." he said. "But I'm not quite done being a human yet," Stan said with a smirk. "I've got plans for this evening. I'll catch you in a bit." He picked up his owner and dropped him off back in his cage, and left the room. He was on his way to Sandy's house, and she would be home in only a short while. He could wait it out.

X X X X X X X X X X X X X X X X X X X

Meanwhile, Dexter had gone to the stationary store to find Cappy. They could find something to do together that night, since it was no use going out and leaving him behind. Since he had no idea where Stan lived, he didn't want to waste time looking for him. He casually walked in the door and was immediately greeted by Sue.

"Curtis! It's good to see you dear! Are you looking for Kip?"

"Yes ma'am, is he busy?" he answered.

"No, the rush of customers died out about an hour ago. He's working the register in the back, but I'll take it from here if you two want to talk," she told him. He could hear her call out for him.

"KI-I-I-I-I-P! Curtis is here! And take off that goll-darned hat you've been wearing all day, it looks ridiculous!" Dexter couldn't help but chuckle at the last comment.

Cappy raced up to the front of the store. He waited for Sue to be out of earshot, and spoke to Dexter using his real name. "So, how has Curtis been? Is he alright?"

"Yeah, he's taken it really well. Much better than I thought." he replied. "How about Kip? Do you mind if I go see him?"

"Not at all. He's right over here." Cappy led Dexter over to his humongous cage. Dexter had never actually seen it before, and was shocked by the size of it.

"You live in THIS? Cappy, this is huge! You must be spoiled rotten!"

His cheeks turned red at the comment. "That's what everyone says when they see it. I'm just used to it though," he said. "Kip is right there. He's been sleeping all day, mostly. He hasn't been doing too bad, either. Pretty good, if you ask me."

"I wonder how Stan and Noel are?" Dexter asked. "It's too bad we don't know where his house is. We could stop by for a visit, otherwise."

Cappy shrugged. "Maybe we'll find him tomorrow if we decide to meet someplace. Anyways, wanna go someplace? I've been dying to get out of here."

"Fine by me," Dexter said. "You choose where we go."

X X X X X X X X X X X X X X X X

Don't mind that comment about the human hamsters meeting the ham-hams in this chapter. It's gonna happen NEXT chapter. For serious. I think.

Yah.

5. Trouble with Siblings

Cha-pa-tar Fiyv-uh

WHOA FAST UPDATE LOL

:D?

Before anyone says otherwise, in some Japanese episodes it shows that Sandy DOES live in a house, and a pretty decent sized one at that. 2 stories, in fact. And yellow! I have no idea what the heck place Noel lives in though, so I'll just make something up.

> I also didn't realize how long this chapter was until I did wordcount. Sweet. More for you guys.<p>

X X X X X X X X X X X X X X X X

Noel began his walk to Sandy's house. It was quite a ways from his own, explaining why they didn't find each other very quickly after they were separated. It would have been a long walk for a human, but Stan was used to going for long distances to get anywhere.

He was almost there when he remembered an important detail he forgot to consider: Hillary. If she was home, it would mean that he probably wouldn't be able to go talk to Sandy alone (or play any nasty tricks on her ¦ but he'd make sure he'd get to that). Even if Hillary was there, Stan wanted to keep going - no use going back now. He could always go see her again when her owner was at the gym.

He walked down the concrete steps up to the porch and rang the doorbell. A couple seconds passed, then a few more. It looked like she wasn't there. No matter, Stan knew where the key to the door was after seeing Sandy's human find it and open the door many times. He was about to reach over and grab it from behind a piece of outdoor furniture when he heard the door click. Hillary was home. He swiftly straightened himself up.

She looked like she was surprised to see him there, but she smiled. "Noel! It's good to see you! What brings you here?" Stan didn't have a good answer, but he quickly made one up.

"Uhh ¦ there's nothing to do over at my place. I just wanted to see what you were up to," he said shyly, much like his owner probably would if they were in their right bodies. It still felt awkward for him to be talking to a human.

"Do you want to come in?" she asked.

"Sure."

He walked into her living room, which looked very different when he wasn't concealed behind something, or 3 inches tall, for that matter. It didn't take long for Stan to notice that it felt nice not having to be constantly be hidden from view.

Hillary invited him over to her couch, and they sat down. "Are you hungry? I was just about to go make a quick supper. I can make enough for two, it'd be no problem."

"Okay," he answered without hesitation. He hadn't eaten yet today, with everything happening it slipped his mind until up to now. It was nearly 6 o'clock, and he was famished. Hopefully the human food she was preparing would be good. Maybe he would automatically like it, since he was human. He'd just have to try it and find out.

Stan waited for about five minutes, and Hillary came out of the kitchen with freshly made sandwiches. Turkey with lettuce and swiss cheese on wheat bread, it did look pretty appetizing, and it was, thankfully. He wolfed it down in no time and topped it off with a glass of water. "You must have been starving! Haven't you eaten all day?" she said with a giggle. Stan just kept quiet.

He then remembered what he had come here for in the first place - to see Sandy. He figured the easiest way would be to bring up the topic, and maybe she'd let him see her. After Hillary had finished her sandwich, he waited for a little bit, and asked her.

"Say, Hill â€“ how's Sandy doing?" It sounded cheesy, but Noel was a pretty cheesy guy so it didn't sound completely weird.

"Sandy? Oh, she's fine. In fact, I should bring her out here. She's been stuck in her cage all day." She stood up and made her way over to her bedroom. Stan almost wanted to say that Sandy had been out for a large part of the day, and had been doing such EVERY day but kept it to himself. Her owner walked out of the bedroom, hamster tucked securely in her hands, and took a seat next to Stan. "She's just as sweet as ever."

"Yah."

"Would you like to hold her?"

Stan wasn't expecting her to ask, but he gladly complied. Hillary held her near his hands, and Sandy willingly hopped over. She looked up and gave him her usual cute, submissive look. It was definitely an odd feeling to have a sister that could fit in your palm. Trying to act normal, he took his first two fingers and gently petted her velvety yellow-orange fur.

Sandy closed her eyes as Stan, who she thought at the time was Noel, continued to pet her. She was enjoying his company, but just wished she could ask him why he was at the clubhouse today. And why stop over at Hillary's house and not bring Stan with? It all seemed strange. After all, Noel did seem to be acting a little â€“ differently than usual. When Sandy looked up again, she realized that "Noel" was glaring down at her, almost penetrating through her with his deep gaze as if he was trying to see something in her. She had never seen him or any human look at her this way, and to say the

least, she was intimidated. She curled into a ball and faced her owner, who smiled warmly at her and made her feel better again.

Hillary looked back up at Stan. "You should've brought Stan over. I'm sure these two would've had fun together. Just a little brother-sister time, you know?" Stan nodded, not wanting to say he's there already. "How's he doing, by the way?" she added.

"Stan's doing â€¢ pretty well, I guess," he made up, "I didn't even think of bringing him. Maybe next time."

Sandy, on the other hand, could not believe what she was hearing. Was Hillary really going to take in such an outrageous claim? It was completely obvious to her that Noel was lying! He probably hurt Stan somehow, and now he's teamed up with Dexter's owner to get the rest of us! Sandy wasn't going to just sit back and take it, either - she opened her mouth wide and chomped down on his finger as hard as she could muster. Stan's eyes widened, as he was taken completely off-guard, and dropped her onto his lap with a short cry of "Gah!"

"Wha-? Did she bite you?" Hillary asked, evident that she was also surprised that her hamster would act so defensively all of a sudden. "I-I'm sorry!"

"Don't worry about it," Stan replied coolly, although he was pretty ticked about it since he knew his sister probably did it on purpose. He picked her up again, and concealed from the view of Sandy's owner, pinched her paw between his thumb and forefinger as a warning of "don't try it again." She tried to bite him once more, but he had quickly handed her over to Hillary before she could.

"She must be tired â€¢ I'd better put her back in her cage so she can rest." She walked away, hamster in hand, and Stan gave her one last dirty look before she left the room. When her human returned, Stan was just about to get ready to head back home until Hillary mentioned one last thing.

"I'm going to be heading to the gym for an evening session with some of the girls, till maybe around 8, I suppose. Tonight. Sorry to kick you out at such short notice, I completely forgot I had the night booked!" she said apologetically. "You can come with, if you want. I'm sure you could just go on the workout equipment or something."

"No thanks, I was just about to go home anyways. I already â€¢ went there today. Thanks for the offer, though." Of course, Stan was lying. As soon as Hillary left he was going to get into her room and talk to Sandy for real - and he might have to reconsider not wanting to mess with her, since revenge sounded better than ever. To leave a good impression, he walked her out to her car and said goodbye. "See you around!"

"Bye Noel!" she shouted from the car window on her way out. Stan walked for about a half-block until he knew she was gone, then headed back to find the house key. He didn't want to break in, but some things had to be done. He reached for the key behind the chair again, pulled it off the nail it was hanging on, and stuck it in the lock. Now â€¢ wait. He didn't know how a key worked. He knew that Hillary

used it to open her door, but he had never seen how she did it. Stan tried to push it in further, to no avail. He took it out, and put it in upside-down. It wouldn't even go in. He put it back in the right way and jiggled it around. Nothing. Infuriated, he threw the key into the grass and collapsed into the chair.

There he sat for a while, letting himself settle down. Stan looked around to make sure there was no neighbors that might have been watching, thinking he was probably a retard because he couldn't open a lock. No matter, it was Noel's body anyways, so they'd think it was him. He could do anything he wanted and not worry about ruining his hamster reputation. Once he became calm, he stood up and picked up the key from the lawn. Time to try again.

He made sure he put it in the right way, and stared at it wondering how to work the darned thing. What hadn't he done yet? He hadn't â€| umm â€| pushed it up and down! â€| Didn't work. What about â€| twisting it? Didn't budge. He turned it the other way. It was working! The key came to a stop, and he pushed the door open with ease. Now what to do?

Stan stopped for a moment in front of the door and listened. The only sound he could hear was the faint noise of Sandy messing around in her cage from the other room. He casually walked into Hillary's bedroom.

Sandy stopped what she was doing as soon as she heard the door open. Hillary was home already? Didn't she just leave ten minutes ago? Oh well, maybe she changed her mind. Sandy went back to what she was doing. But â€| huh? These footsteps sounded heavier than her owner's graceful stride. What if â€|

"Ah!" she yelped, seeing Noel walk in the door. She immediately took cover in her hamster-house. _"He's obviously back to come get me! Oh, what am I supposed to do?!"_ She wrapped herself in fluff. _"I bet he and Curtis hurt - or maybe killed gulp Stan and Dexter! â€| Whatever I do, I CAN'T let him find out about the other ham-hams at the clubhouse!"_

Stan paused in front of the cage. Why wasn't his sister out in the open? She almost never went into her hamster-house. Or maybe she wasn't in the cage at all. He remembered that the roofs of the houses came off easily, and carefully took the cover off.

No one was inside.

He took a couple steps back and looked around the room, memories of earlier that day when he had chased Noel around came to mind. He checked around for a bit, making sure she wasn't looking at him from behind anything. Since he didn't want to be doing that all night, he decided he would check in the cage one more time and make a quick run of the house, and if she was nowhere to be found, he'd leave. He looked in the cage one more time and almost turned around, but he saw a clump of fluff piled in the corner that he could have SWORN just moved.

Sandy knew that Noel was right above her, and kept still. _"Please go away â€| I'll do anything!"_

Stan took his hand and pulled some of the fuzz away, and almost

instantaneously he saw his sister bound out through the top of the small house. She attempted going out the door, but Stan moved his arm slightly when she passed through to pin her between him and the bars. His effort proved ineffective, as Sandy's flexible body slipped right through without trouble. He grasped her before she disappeared into the rest of the house. She wasn't about to go down without a fight, though. Sandy began aggressively clawing and biting at Stan's hands, but as much as it hurt, he was going to hold on this time. He tried to make her hold still, but nothing was working. Finally, Sandy took her front teeth and pierced it directly under his nail, and that was the last straw. Stan crouched down and tossed her from his hands onto the floor, kneeled closely by her, and growled at her angrily.

"QUIT IT!"

Sandy turned around and cowered. Her heart had skipped a beat when he shouted at her, and she was SURE she was going to die by him now. What happened to the quiet, gentle Noel she had known only a few days earlier? If only she could warn the others â€| She felt him grab the scruff of her neck by his thumb and forefinger and lift her high into the air. Surely this was it. Sandy didn't want to look, and covered her face with her paws.

Stan looked at his sister inquisitively. Why was she acting this way? She was never afraid of humans before, and for some reason she was going mad. He held her up to his eyes. That's when, in as soft of voice as she could, he heard her talk.

"Please â€| when you kill me, don't make it hurt."

That's when Stan realized - What am I doing?! He didn't know that she was this terrified. What did he do that made her think that? It all started with the bite she gave him when he was talking with Hillary. He couldn't figure out what provoked it. The fact that he had made his sister feel this terrible made him sick with himself. He had to set things straight, and fast.

"Sandy- " Her ears perked up, and she peeked from behind her quivering paws. "Don't you see it? Weren't you wondering why Stan wasn't showing up to the clubhouse?"

Sandy didn't move. "_How much did Stan give away?"_ She assumed this was the part where he confessed he killed his own hamster, then squeezed her to death or something horrible like that. But it never happened.

"It's me. Your brother. Stan," he said. "Just â€| I don't know how to explain it."

Sandy listened intently

"I woke up this morning, and everything seemed kinda normal â€| but then I got up. I honestly don't know how it happened. Sandy â€|"

It wasn't comprehending. Stan - in his owner's body? What? He must be lying â€| he HAS to be!

"Sandy, please believe me," he said softly. She shook her head vigorously.

Stan sighed, and brought her over to the desk and set her down. "Remember when the ham-hams held that surprise party for us when we found each other? And we fought on our birthday. You broke my maracas, and I was pretty mad, but we forgave each other, right?" Sandy had to rethink her opinion. Maybe he was telling the truth. These were some things that Noel couldn't possibly know. She removed her paws from in front of her eyes and looked at him.

"And, and â€œ our song! Twirling whirling!" He sang a few verses of it.

_Twirling whirling round we go,
> *Twirling high, and twirling low,*
> *See the colors skip and flow â€œ*_

She knew it. Only Stan could sing their song like he could, even if he didn't have his own voice. Sandy wiped the tears from her eyes and hugged his finger. ""Stan, I would have never-"

"Would anyone have guessed it?" he joked. He picked her up again, and this time she had no problem with it.

"But big brother - really big brother, I guess - how did it happen? And what about Dexter and Curtis?" she asked.

"Them too. And Cappy. He switched with Kip. The only problem is that none of us know why it happened, and neither do our humans."

"We have to tell the other ham-hams then! We'll hurry and go tom-"

"No!" he cut in, "not yet. If we can figure out a way to reverse the effects of whatever did this to us before they know, it'll save us a whole lot of explaining. And you know how slow some of those guys are." She nodded. "I chose to tell you because you're important to me. I think we can do this together."

He looked at the clock. "I'd better get going before your Hillary comes back. Come to my house tomorrow, and we'll figure something out. Okay?"

"Okay."

Stan stood up from his spot, said goodbye, and left. He had a feeling the next couple days were going to be very long.

X X X X X X X X X X X X X X X X

Next chapter - ummmmm â€œ more Curtis and Kip, since I left them out of this one. And. Um. Shtuff.

6. You Seem Strange

CHAPTER 6

Oh my god you guys. It's been 2 years.

GODDAMN LONG CHAPTER. Seriously, I was typing this in WordPad and since it doesn't have a word count I had nothing to go on. I could

have easily split this into 2. Also there was no spellcheck or anything "fancy" like that, so please excuse any mistakes. D:

But really, I thought I'd never get around to this again.

X X X X X X X X X X X X X X X X X X X

"Done!" Panda said as he wiped the sweat off his brow. "I think I fixed it for you, Boss!" Yes indeed, the water cooler was good as new. He had even put in the spare water jug. There really wasn't anything Panda couldn't fix, at least material-wise. Boss thanked him and apologized for his angry outburst the morning before, feeling bad that he canceled their trip to Acorn Mountain.

It was about 9:00 at night and the ham-hams had come together for a special meeting of sorts. Everyone was there except for Stan, Dexter, and Cappy of course. They needed to find out what was up with the three hamsters and the sudden appearance of their humans at the clubhouse door. Could they be connected? Possibly. But little did they know...

"Order in the clubhouse!" Boss pounded on the table to get everyone's attention. "I gather us all here tonight to get to the bottom of this mystery surrounding our fellow ham-hams!" The other paid close attention. "Tonight we are going to perform a super-secret spy mission into their houses and rescue them! We shall call it... Operation... hmm..."

"Stuff," Howdy prompted. "Operation Stuff."

Boss scoffed. "Ridiculous! It needs to have a much more awesome name than that, like: OPERATION FIRESTORM. That sounds intense."

"Okay, guys, I hate to stifle your, umm, 'creativity', but the name really doesn't matter. We need to get focused!" Maxwell said. "The point is to find out if their humans know about the clubhouse, see if Dexter, Cappy and Stan are alright, and possibly bring them back here with us if they are in any sort of danger. Wasn't that what you told me, Sandy?"

She stalled for a second, as she wasn't paying attention. "I, uh..."

"Yeah, you told me earlier today that you thought their humans might secretly be hurting them or something, keeping them locked up because they discovered our little secret. You were pretty concerned," he said.

Sandy hesitated for a moment. Yes, that's what she said that afternoon to him, but now she knew the truth. What was she to do? "Oh, um, yes!" she played along, "we definitely need to see what's up!" She really had no idea what the ham-hams had in mind, and she wasn't quite sure if she wanted to tag along with them. What if they found the humans (as hamsters, of course), and dragged them to the clubhouse? Then they would find out everything. What were they planning on doing to the former ham-hams?

"As I thought!" Maxwell continued. "Now for our plan. Though there are three places to visit, I don't think splitting up would be the wisest choice, as there are only nine of us left and that would put

us in groups of three. There's strength in numbers, you know." The other nodded. "The place closest to here is downtown, where Kip and Sue's shop is as well as the eyeglass store. We'll stop there first. Then we'll find Noel's house."

"Not to butt in or anything, but what are we gonna do when we get to these places?" Oxnard said sheepishly. No one had really thought about this.

"Well, uhh..." Maxwell didn't know what to say.

"We'll find out when we get there!" Boss interrupted. "We can't have a plan for everything, besides, what if the circumstances aren't what had planned on? This way we can be flexible!" They hesitantly agreed.

Sandy was having a really hard time keeping her mouth shut, but it was for the best. Stan was right that it would be best if all of this just passed on without needing to explain it to everyone and get them all involved. Don't ask, don't tell. But then again if they raided their houses they'd all probably find out eventually anyway. The others began to chat amongst themselves as Sandy casually walked to the cooler to get a drink. She wasn't watching where she was going and bumped into Howdy. She apologized and tried moving around him, but he moved in front of her to block her path.

"What's the secret password?" he playfully asked.

"It's... ugh, Howdy, let me through! Like, I mean it!" She began to get frustrated.

"Nope. No password. No go."

She facepalmed. "Fine. The password is 'Howdyisawesome'. Now just let me get a drink."

"Nice work! You pass," he giggled, as usual. "The password is the truth, you know." Sandy ignored him and just filled her cup. "You know what? Ya'lls makin' me thirsty. Let me have a go." Howdy grabbed his own cup as Sandy downed hers.

"Now!" Boss shouted atop the other ham's conversations, "we pull off this plan! Is everyone ready to save our fellow ham-hams?" They replied with a uniform "Yeah!!"

"Hee hee! And maybe we can play a few, ahem, tricks on their humans before we leave!" Howdy grinned evilly.

"Ohhh dear," Sandy thought. "Stan is not gonna be happy about this."

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Noel paced around his cage. It was late, and he should have been asleep, but in all honesty no one in their right mind would probably sleep in a situation like his. He placed his paws on the whiz-wheel to move it up and down and heard its signature annoying squeaking. "I wonder if this is actually a workout?" he thought. He could never pass up an opportunity.

Carefully, Noel jumped up into the spinning wheel. He positioned himself in a position to run while trying to hold his balance. "Now how to start..." He began to jog as if he were starting on a treadmill. It was different, though, and tough to keep a steady pace, but as he got used to it he began to run faster. "Nice ... I could like this thing!" He pushed up his speed further. Maybe it was a little too fast. Suddenly, he slipped and felt his back paw get caught in the wheel. He was immediately sent head over heels tumbling in the contraption and out onto the bedding of the cage.

Noel sat up and rubbed his head. "Owww... maybe I won't try that again!" He looked around the cage once more for other things to do. He had already eaten some sunflower seeds from his food dish and not surprisingly they didn't taste much different from the ones you might find at a baseball game, minus the salt. All was mostly well except that he was almost out of water. "Dangit," he said to himself, "I was gonna fill that up today!" He looked around for something else he could get a drink from. A water bottle by the side of his bed, perhaps? It wouldn't be so much of a risk, anyway. Stan was sleeping on the couch in the living room instead of in the bed, so it's not like he'd wake up.

He quietly opened the cage door and slipped out. He looked up at the bottle for a moment, but then thought _"Nahh... I'd never actually be able to get the water out if I got up to it. I'd probably just spill it all over myself."_ As long as he was out of the cage, though, he might as well do something. To tell the truth, though, he kind of wanted to get out of the house and lay on the grass under the stars. Maybe this could calm him down and get him to sleep. He quickly crossed the expanse of carpet in his room and into the room where Stan was fast asleep. Noel then darted under the door and onto the lawn. Free at last!

He padded up to one of the trees in the front yard, lying down at the base of its trunk. The night sky was beautiful tonight. He closed his eyes and wandered off into thought.

"Quick! Over this way!" Boss commanded the ham-hams. They had just found themselves in front of the stationary store that Kip and Sue owned. The group moved silently, trying not to attract the attention of any listening alley cats, then slipped under the crack between the door and the ground.

"Cappy's cage can't be hard to miss," Panda said. "It's enormous." They split off in search of it and found it at the back of the store. All of them huddled around the entrance, hoping that the worst had not occurred to Cappy. Quietly, Boss opened the cage door and they went inside.

Cappy's "house" was at the top of three levels of ramps that were built into the cage. Boss and Hamtarō decided to take the lead, walking up the three flights to reach the miniature house. Once there, the two huffed around for any clue as to where the hamster might be, as he had to be in his cage somewhere; they knew that Cappy would never venture out at night.

"Over here!" Hamtarō motioned to Boss. A gold colored pan was lying upside-down by one of the walls in the cage. They slowly approached

it.

"Cappy?" Boss whispered. He said it louder. "Cappy!" No answer. He decided just to go for it and overturned the pan.

"AHHH!!!!" shrieked the terrified hamster underneath it. Hamtaro and Boss stumbled back as they were caught completely off-guard. "W-who are you?!"

"Cappy! Settle down!" Boss walked back up to him. "It's us, Hamtaro and Boss! You know, the ham-hams? The rest are down below waiting for us. Where have you been?!"

Of course, it was not Cappy at all, but Kip, who was certainly not expecting visitors in the middle of the night. "What? Cappy? I'm n—" Kip began, but stopped himself. "Oh yeah. Yes. That's me. Eheheh." He grinned nervously. Boss and Hamtaro gave him a suspicious look.

"Yeah, Cappy, where have you been?" Hamtaro questioned. Both he and Boss waited for an answer.

"I...uhh..." Kip had no idea how to answer this. He had no idea who these guys were, or what they wanted him for. And "ham-hams?" What was this, some kind of hamster gang? He had no idea that Cappy was in a gang.

"You look like you've seen a ghost! What's wrong with you, kid?" Boss said. "You seem different."

"Well, you see ..." he started, "I just wanted to rest for a few days. That's all." Luckily this answer didn't seem completely farfetched.

"Well geez, you could have told us beforehand!" Boss said. "But hey, do you know where Stan and Dexter are? Did they take a 'break' too?"

Kip didn't know who these two were either. "I dunno ... I haven't heard from them, I guess."

"Anyway. We're going to look for them, because we're a bit suspicious. You don't seem like your humans are a part of it, but the other day me, Sandy, and Howdy saw Curtis and Noel outside of the clubhouse door, and that was the same day that Stan and Dexter didn't show up. We're thinking they locked them in their cages and possibly found out about our little club. I think it was just a coincidence that you were gone the same day," he said. "Am I right? Or is there something going on?" Boss eyed Kip.

"Noel and Curtis? Curtis sounds familiar..." Kip thought to himself. "Oh! The owner of the glasses store? Curtis Milan? Couldn't be." He looked up at Boss. "Umm, no! No sir! My humans are just normal. You know, Kip and Sue," he feigned a grin again.

"Yeah, I bet," Boss said. "Now hurry up, we've gotta get to the glasses store and see what's up with Dexter!"

"Ah, the glasses shop! It must be Curtis Milan!" Kip thought as Boss dragged him by the arm back down to the others who were waiting.

"Man, look at all these hamsters! I hope they aren't 'initializing' me into their gang or anything!"

"Odely, what was goin' on up there? I heard a bit o' yellin' goin' on," Howdy asked.

"Nothing. Cappy was just being a 'fraidy-cat," Boss explained. Kip wanted to object but decided he'd better keep quiet. The other hamsters didn't seem to know about the switch that had taken place.

Maxwell walked up to them. "We're glad you're alright, Cappy! But we need to move on to the next place so we can finish before dawn. To the optometry shop!" Boss led the way and the rest followed suit. Kip simply tagged along, but felt nervous around one hamster in particular who was walking behind him. As Kip turned around to see who was behind him, he noticed a certain tiger-striped female was staring him down. He pretended to ignore it and continued walking along, though his paws became sweaty with nervousness. He hadn't been outside since he had turned into a hamster, either. Kip just hoped that Sue wouldn't discover that he was missing, or at the very least he would be back by morning or all hell would break loose.

"I can't believe it. I know this is Kip, but what do I do? Do I tell him what I know?" Sandy thought.

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Back at the glasses shop, Curtis had finally calmed down inside his hamster's cage. One look at the clock on the wall told him that it was a quarter past 12 in the morning, and that he was usually in bed by this time. But he didn't need to get up for work or anything, so what would be the problem? If only there was something to do...

He closed his eyes for a moment only to be startled by a scratching noise that seemed to be emanating from the front door. He looked up. A series of dark shadows could be seen moving behind the space between the door and the ground. He could hear chatter, but these shadows didn't seem to be of human origin, so where was it coming from?

Suddenly, one of the shapes crawled under the door. "Mice? In my store?" He took a closer look. No, it looked to be another hamster, but a bit bigger than himself. Others followed behind this one, 10 to be exact. Who were these rodents, and what did they want with me? Ugh, if only Curtis could be his usual human self things would be much less complicated. He looked down and saw them approaching his cage, as it wasn't hidden from shoppers as well as Cappy's was.

"Hey! Dexter! We see you up there!" Curtis heard a gruff voice coming from below. "What the heck do you think you're doing? Where have you been?" Curtis, not knowing how to respond, backed away from the ledge and out of their sight. "HEY! Don't make me come up there, you!"

As he sat in the middle of the cage, a frustrated grunt was heard as well as some more chatter. He still didn't know what they were doing here. He laid back down, hoping they would give up and leave him along for the night. All seemed pretty well until he heard a clang by his cage door that jolted him up again.

"Dexter, cowboy, where've you been?!" Curtis looked up to see a large tan and black hamster as well as a smaller brown one with a red apron standing in the entryway. "No... could it be? GOLDIE'S hamster?" Inconceivable! "Yes, it was Howdy, who jumped over to his bespectacled hamster friend. "What've ya been up to, boy?"

He didn't know how to react. It was a good thing for him, though, that he and his hamster practically had the same personality, which was about to save them a lot of confusion within the group. He looked at the hamsters who had arrived at his shop and it looked like they had been out looking for him. He'd have to make up a plausible excuse. "Why, I was simply minding my own business and tending the shop with Curtis, as you should know," he explained, "...Howdy." Curtis hoped that he had used the correct name to address him with. Maybe hamsters didn't use the names their owners gave them? Then again, he didn't know they communicated like this in the first place.

"Well duh, so do I. You sick or somethin'? Secretly talkin' to Curtis? 'Cuz by the way, yer human was outside our clubhouse door earlier. Got an explanation for that?"

Curtis raised his eyebrows. "Oh my, what has Dexter been up to? I hope he isn't causing a disturbance in the neighborhood. I'm not sure that hamsters know proper human etiquette in public..."

"Well?"

"I..."

"Ya know, Stan's human was with him too. Since when are they best friends? The two are complete opposites." Howdy glared at him, hoping for an answer.

Curtis, of course, had no idea who this other person was, and he probably didn't care to know. Who was Stan? Was this another hamster? "I'm not sure of the intentions of my 'human', exactly," he offered as an excuse, but unwittingly made it sound awfully fishy.

"Hmmmph, if you say so," Boss said, not looking too convinced. "Where is he, anyway?"

"De-...Curtis, you mean? He's back in his room, sleeping of course. It's late you know." He had to stop himself from saying the name of his hamster. "Look, it was personal matters. It is none of your affairs." he told them. It was telling the truth, but not quite the answer they were looking for.

"Whatever, then, come on down with us. We already picked up Cappy who was 'taking a break', and we're off to see where Stan is. Sandy thinks that Noel might have done something to him or locked him in his cage because she hasn't heard a word from him since two mornings ago, and usually they see each other daily."

Curtis nodded in agreement and complied with Howdy and Boss's request to follow them down to the floor where the others were waiting. Quickly, they all crept under the door and out onto the sidewalk. Curtis figured that Dexter wouldn't be overly concerned about his

disappearance, though he wished he could have informed him in advance.

Two hours had passed, and the group was steadily growing tired. It was definitely a long haul between locations when you were a hamster. The other ham-hams talked amongst themselves, but Kip and Curtis were left by themselves besides the occasion question from one of the others. Finally, when everyone else wasn't paying attention, Sandy made her move on the two unsuspecting hamsters. She grabbed them both by the wrist and dragged them just out of earshot behind the group.

"Hey ... what's going on?!" Kip demanded. "What did we do?"

"Yes, please do explain to us what in the world is going on here!" Curtis added.

"Shhh, the others can't hear this, okay? Just trust me on this one," Sandy said. She looked up again at the rest of the ham-hams to make sure none were paying attention. "Look. I know you're not Dexter and Cappy. You're their humans, if I'm told right. Curtis and Kip." They paused for a moment to each look at the other, then nodded. "So far, I think there's only three of you. As you can see, two of those three are already right in front of me. The third is my brother, Stan, and his owner Noel. I don't think you know him." Kip and Curtis shook their heads.

"Can you please tell us why this happened? It's not permanent, is it?" Kip asked with a worried expression.

"I... I don't know," Sandy told them. "But my hamster friends that got switched with you guys are kind of freaking out too. At least the one I got to meet. And yes, hopefully this is only temporary."

"So you're saying that you are the only one of this entire bunch that is aware of the situation? Why is that, do you have something to do with it?" Curtis asked her apprehensively.

"No, no, it's not like that!" she told them, "I'm just as lost as you are." A few seconds passed before anyone spoke.

"And you," Curtis cut in, "Kip? The owner of the stationary store down the street from me? I had no idea..."

"Me neither! It's a pleasure to meet you Mr. Milan, though not in the best of circumstances," Kip greeted cheerfully as he shook his paw.

"Ay, Sandy, what're you doin' back there?" Boss shouted from ahead. Get back up here, we're nearly there!"

"Sorry, coming!" Sandy yelled back. She looked back at Curtis and Kip and whispered to them. "Hey, if you like, have any trouble just come find me. I'll help you out," she said, and winked at the two hamsters before dragging them back to the rest of the group.

"Good, we're all still here!" Boss stated. "You know, you might not want to be trailing at the end of the group like that. You never know when some cat might pop out of an alley and decide to have you for an early breakfast." Curtis and Kip looked at each other nervously. "But

hey, we're here!"

They looked up to see the small house that Stan and his owner lived in. It would only be a matter of time...

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